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Note:

Mr. John Hume M.P. discussed with me his submission to the Crowther Commission, copy attached. He made the following comments on the four proposals listed on Pages 1 and 2 of his evidence:-

1) he feels that the Commission must accept proposal No.1 which provides for a constitutional right to advocate constitutional change by peaceful means. This right has already been stated by Mr. Wilson and Mr. Callaghan and more or less endorsed by Chichester-Clark and other members of the Stormont Government in public statements. As a consequence legislation containing political discrimination, such as the Flags and Emblems Act, would have to be removed;

2) he is hopeful that the Crowther Commission might favour the re-introduction of proportional representation. Any such recommendation, if enacted, would have enormous political results. As an example it would certainly bring to an end the present colouration of the Fermanagh Co. Council - which Hume believes will probably be brought to an end anyway if the Review Body on local government reform produces a good report. Proportional representation would also do much more than that. Experience has shown that the right-wing tail wags the Unionist dog under a straight voting system and the power of the right-wing could suffer an eclipse under P.R. Hume points out also in his evidence that the political advantage of housing segregation would disappear under P.R.

3) he wondered what our view might be on the idea of a periodic referendum on the question of Northern Ireland remaining an integral part of the United Kingdom. I said that I was not aware that the Government had taken a look at this possibility and that I could only speak personally on the subject. As an interested observer I found it difficult to agree that a periodic referendum would remove the constitutional question from party politics - rather I thought it might do the opposite. Secondly I was not sure that I would favour the idea as a loss by us in the first referendum, which appeared to me certain, might be used effectively against any idea of future unification, might discourage the minority with unforeseeable effects, might weaken our position internationally on the issue and might cause trouble in the twenty six counties. At the same time I felt that the Unionist Party would necessarily oppose a referendum as it implied an acceptance of the idea that unification might eventually be voted and that therefore the best posture for Dublin could be to take no position on the subject and leave it to the Unionists to worry about the idea. I made it clear that these were only preliminary notions in my own mind and should not be seen as an official view of policy. I also added that, whereas the Taoiseach regarded the willing consent of the majority in the North as a necessary pre-requisite to the real unity of Ireland, I was not sure that anything like a formal approval of a referendum on national unity confined to the North was in his mind, particularly in view of the traditional and legitimate assertion that a local majority in the North had had no right to vote itself out of Ireland in the first place. Why should we, in effect, consecrate such a right to them now when by waiting and patiently preparing the ground North and South we stood a fair chance of achieving reunification in a foreseeable time without risking anything?

4) Hume seemed reasonably sanguine that the Crowther Commission would report in favour of a Bill of Rights.

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Other subjects discussed were:-

- 1) Gerry Fitt appears to have changed his mind about the formation of a new party but Hume and the others intend to proceed with it anyway and will probably now drop the word "Labour" from the title. Hume feels that Fitt has been persuaded against the new party by Paddy Kennedy.
- 2) Hume will speak in the Trinity celebrations next Friday evening on the motion "that Emmet's Epitaph may now be written". He will speak against the motion and will take as his main theme the view that republicanism is not the property of any person or group in Ireland but has a wide connotation and a long history. He is preparing a major speech on this theme.
- 3) he hopes that the Unionist Party will take action against the five unionists, Craig, West, John McQuade, Dr. Norma~~V~~ Laird and Robert Mitchell, who voted against the Government on two Police Bill amendments last week. He feels that if the Unionist Party do not now take/action against these five people there will be greater trouble for the Party when local government reform is reached. /disciplinary
- 4) he is satisfied that the attacks in Stormont on the mistakes made to date by the Stormont Information Service have had a real affect in preventing the Unionists from maintaining a widespread propaganda offensive against the minority.

I understand that Paddy Doherty is going to the Virgin Islands next week to take up employment there.

I also gather very confidentially that Du Pont is in difficulty in Derry - due to technological developments elsewhere in producing synthetic materials - and may have to lay off about half its present work force, about 600 out of 1,200 employees. This will be a severe shock as Du Pont expected until recently to expand in the Maytown estate and is, of course, the big drawing card for Derry. High level consultations to prevent this virtual disaster are taking place this week and include senior officials from the Ministry of Technology.


3 Márta 1970